Our Faith

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Purpose: To preserve and strengthen the Christian essence of Unitarianism

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A Unitarian Christian Voice in Germany

(The following is a translation of a section of an article by CLEMENS TAESSLER, minister of the Unitarian Fellowship of Free Religion, Frankfurt, Germany, appearing in the Fellowship's monthly, *Mitteilungsblatt*, for November, 1949, a copy of which was sent to OUR FAITH by Knut Halle, Flatbush, N. Y.)

The word "Unitarian" (belief in the oneness of God) came into use around 1600, but "Unitarian" as a conception, corresponding to the "Anti-Trinitarian" conception (dissent from the teaching of three-in-one) goes back to the time when the church first formulated the dogma of the trinity.

Professor Voelker (Vienna) says in the *Dictionary of Theology and Religious Knowledge*, "The leading idea of the Unitarians, to stand by the unity and 'simplicity' of God in opposition to the trinitarian form of the concept of God (tri-unity) is as old as the formation of church dogma, even though the name 'Unitarian' first emerges at the beginning of the seventeenth century."

Professor Harnack, in his *History of Dogma*, presents "dogma" as three-branched, namely, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Anti-Trinitarianism. Naturally he follows the last-named only in its incomplete expression as "Socinianism" and not in its later and more pure form as genuine Unitarianism.

The English author, J. W. Robertson, in his *Short History of Christianity*, says: "The earliest Jewish believers in Jesus were simply Unitarians; also the Jesus of Paul . . . was no member of a trinity."

The Unitarians in Ostfranken, the Forerunners of the German Catholics (Frankfurt, 1846) designates the German Catholic communions led by Johannes Ronge in 1845, which was the basic movement of free German religion on its free Catholic side, as "followers and heirs of the Unitarian view of Jesus." Along with this goes an extract from an historical work by Dr. Georg Lommel, secretary of the Royal Bavarian Archives, who says that "the earliest view of Jesus was Unitarian and not Trinitarian, and has little in common with the teaching of modern Catholicism or even of Protestantism." And further that "the German Catholicism of today is no innovation, but only a renewing of the original Unitarian view of Jesus." "Monotheistic (Unitarian) Christianity, suppressed but never destroyed, has always existed."

It is pure caprice to do what some people who call themselves Unitarians have done in Germany the last few years, equating the word "Unitarian" (belief in the oneness of God) with the word "Monistic" (belief in the oneness of the world), and perverting the Christian word "Unitarian" in applying it to those who declare themselves to be non-Christian.

Grant that in the United States of America also there are Unitarian ministers and members who veer away from Christianity and announce a vague "universal religion" which is "greater than Christianity"; grant, indeed, that such "Unitarians" turn away from all belief in God and designate themselves prettily as "humanists" instead of deniers of God; yet there is ever at hand an historical name for us, and one not newly given. It is free Christianity that still has the adherence of most of the Unitarians in the United States, and almost all in England and in other lands.

The culture of the western world is Christian. Its ideals, ethos, and moral stamp are Christian. . . . Only on the basis of respect for the Christian spirit, kept distinct from dogma, will the ever undefeated religious reform movement win the most people and stand ready to dislodge dogmatic sectarianisms. But a growth in the denial of God, in the denial of immortality, and in the devaluation of our Christian heritage and ethos would certainly bring our western culture under an eclipse.

Ecclesiastical Therapy

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There are times when churches and denominations are like individuals in their need of pastoral care. Churches have fears and discouragements, conflicts and perplexities, dissensions and divisions. When this is the condition, prophecy is not enough. In fact, where the free mind principle widely prevails, prophecy may add to the conflicts and divisions, and thus decrease the well-being of the whole.

There is no room for compromise or weak silence. But there is room for changed attitudes and interests through which the usefulness of the church will be increased, and profit gained from the diversity of prophecies.

Here enters pastoral care, with its assumption that right attitudes and occupations will order the mind and heart of the church for effective living. Pastoral care aims to strengthen trust and faith, courage and good will. It faces the defects and shortcomings of mind and spirit, and for remedy prescribes a way of life. It prescribes occupational therapy, which is a medicine for churches and denominations as well as for individuals.

During recent years the most potent force for the promotion of unity and healthy-mindedness in our Unitarian denomination has been the Unitarian Service Committee, and the part which we all have played in it. We did not initiate the Service Committee as ecclesiastical therapy, but it has been exactly that. Without it, our perplexities would be more numerous, and our unity greatly weakened.

There is agreement among us that the Sermon on the Mount still remains the law and the gospel of mature and civilized living. But it should be noted that the Sermon on the Mount has nothing to say about the controversial subjects which detract from the unity and effectiveness of our denominational life, whereas it has much to say about occupations which encourage healthy minds and spirits. Following the Sermon on the Mount would not cause us to neglect prophecy, but it would enable us to use prophecy without loss of unity.

Churches and denominations should exemplify the graces and virtues which they recommend to the people in the pews. They should be trustful and unselfish. They should speak the truth in love, be reverent, patient, forbearing. The best-known way to do all this is to put first things first, to cultivate a right spirit, and to do the will of God.

Our Christian Heritage

(The following is reprinted from the A. U. A. General Conference Sermon, "The Decline of the West and the Liberal Faith," delivered at the Church of our Father, Portland, Oregon, on August 15, 1949, by N. W. LOVELY, pastor of the First Unitarian Church, San Antonio, Texas.)

The Unitarian congregations have, from the beginning, been led by scribes and scholars, trained and educated in the Christian tradition. All of these have rejected the old doctrine of original sin and vicarious atonement. But most of them have brought, for the enrichment of their new faith, treasures of experience and wisdom garnered by the Christian culture through 1800 years of magnificent service.

This ancient wisdom has made a characteristic and indelible impress upon the forms and substance of our teaching. As Paul brought to Christianity the wisdom of the Jews, as Augustine brought the traditions of classical culture — so the founders and leaders of our faith have brought the treasures of Christianity and Western humanism for the guidance and enrichment of the liberal way. Indeed the best hope of survival for the Christian tradition is that it shall be incorporated into a faith which is fitted to serve and survive in the difficult days ahead.

Those of us who are tied by conviction and sentiment to the great traditions of Christianity expect that they will be accepted and developed as valued treasures within our new household of faith. Indeed, we feel that no culture which wholly abandons them deserves to survive in the years to come.

On the one hand the intelligent among us know that much of the outmoded impedimenta of the old religion must be discarded and dismissed as poisonous and dangerous in these critical times. We know that the central Christian concepts of the nature of man and the nature of Christ must be denied and eventually forgotten. They are not even allegorically or symbolically valid or valuable. To the extent that we are intelligent, we are prepared to discipline ourselves and to overcome our natural desire to bring along all the odds and ends of ritual, vocabulary, and doctrine to which we have become, perhaps sentimentally, attached.

On the other hand, we believe that the gratuitous denigration of past cultures, or irreverence for the deep convictions of any human being, has nothing to contribute to a

fellowship based on a faith in the dignity of man. Whatever in the Christian tradition we find useful or necessary we shall insist upon using. The character of Jesus as sketched in the gospels, the ideal of universal human brotherhood, the spirit of love and humility, the records of patient courage which have marked Christianity at its best — these must be remembered and cherished by all humanity. This is the Christianity which Channing thought "essential" and which Parker called "permanent." It is in no way exclusive or repressive. Nor does it involve the peculiar views of Catholic-Christian culture which are unacceptable to liberal minds. This is the Christianity which speaks of man's worth, his dignity, and his inherent capacity for growth toward perfection. It is the Christianity which has inspired great men of many nations, and of many religious cultures. We intend that Unitarians shall not surrender their share in this rich heritage. . . .

The early congregations, in which the liberal faith first found organized social and cultural expression, were bound together by a simple covenant: "In the love of truth and in the spirit of Jesus, we unite for the worship of God and the service of man." The American Unitarian Association has as its primary purpose the advancement of pure religion "which according to the teaching of Jesus is summed up in love to God and love to man." . . .

Our way of life is made up of worship and service. To neglect either is to surrender the completeness of purpose which makes our culture a valid way of life for complete and wholesome persons. Among us there has always been a strong tradition of worship and a deep concern for dignified expression of our love to God.

I use the word God without apology. For among English-speaking people that is the word used to signify any object of worship. And any worship which is not directed to some objective reality is a travesty and mockery and no true worship at all.

Among Unitarians every person has been and shall be free to express any opinion about the nature of God that he or she may hold on the basis of experience, perception and reason. He is free to express doubts as well as affirmations about the object of worship. But he is not free to deny that the worship of God and expression of love toward God is a vital and integral part of the Unitarian Way. He is not free to assert that any individual or any congregation which neglects the worship of God is fully representative of the rich and inspiring faith which our fellowship would offer as the basis of more abundant life for all the children of men.

To Be Considered

Among the proposals to amend the By-Laws of the American Unitarian Association coming before the next Annual Meeting there are two which if adopted will effect changes in the constitution of the Board of Directors. These amendments are printed on pages 176-7 of the current Year Book.

One proposed amendment would abolish the nine members of the Board of Directors who are called "regional vice-presidents" and would substitute for them six members nominated by the regional conferences. Another proposed amendment would reduce the number of the three-year members from 18 to 12.

The following two tables give the situation at a glance. The italicized items indicate nomination by the Nominating Committee.

Board of Directors as at present:

(a)	Four-year officers nominated by the Directors	3
(b)	One-year representatives nominated by the national organizations	4
(c)	*Two-year Moderator*	1
(d)	*One-year members*	2
(e)	*Three-year members*	18
(f)	*One-year regional vice-presidents*	9
		37

Board of Directors as proposed:

(a)	to (d) to remain as above	10
(e)	*Three-year members*	12
(f)	One-year representatives nominated by the regional organizations	6
		28

It will be seen that the proposed amendments would reduce the number of directors from 37 to 28. At present the Nominating Committee nominates 30; under the amendments it would nominate 15. The 7 not nominated by the Nominating Committee at present are the 3 officers and the 4 representatives of the national organizations. Under the proposed amendments the number not nominated by the Nominating Committee would be increased to 13 by having the six regions each nominate a member.

It will be seen also that the number of three-year members would be reduced from 18 out of 37 to 12 out of 28, and that all of these three-year members would remain nominated by the Nominating Committee.

This is merely a presentation of the proposed amendment; it is not an appraisal. However, the 1949 Report of the Commission on Planning and Review endorsed the idea of having the regional vice-presidents selected by the regions themselves instead of by the Nominating Committee. The other proposal, to reduce the number of the three-year members from 18 to 12, will have to be evaluated independently.

R. G.-S.

Letter From a Mother

I have just read the January issue of OUR FAITH from beginning to end. I was struck with the importance of the faith being taught; at least enough to expose our youth to its teachings.

Having been brought up in the Methodist and Congregational churches, with a truly liberal attitude toward the beliefs of others, I could honestly encompass in my faith all that Unitarian Christianity stands for. If I could go a little farther because of my deeper experiences, it did not mean that I was wrong, or that the Unitarian faith was wrong. It simply meant to me that I thought it was perfectly possible for us to have in our town a successful federated Church comprising Unitarians and Congregationalists. With that in mind we have worked toward a common goal for our young people, based on "Freedom of Religious Thinking."

Yet there is a danger that nothing of religious thinking of any sort shall be offered. Young people are naturally religious, given an opportunity. But if you expose them to nothing but entertainment you cannot hope to give them "freedom of religious thinking," or to make Unitarians of them.

I do feel that we are making a mistake if we do not expose our young people to various types of Christian thinking and experience so that they can honestly choose a Christian religion for themselves.

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A Place for Humanism

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It is my honest judgment, and my own experience, that humanism as a religion is inadequate for spiritual nourishment. Note that I stress its inadequacy, not its error. Humanism asks little more than what a literate man-of-the-world already believes. But a mature religion calls for a much greater stretch of credence than mere worldly common sense. Humanism provides a kind of minimum: Jesus is at least a great Teacher; science should serve man. So much is incontrovertible. But questions reach the level where only insight and trust, grubbed out of millennium-old experience, can answer. This is the realm of theism. Only the Christian faith, liberally interpreted, can answer the deepest wants of man.

What I do affirmatively bespeak, therefore, is a creative realization of the need for levels of understanding. I am a Unitarian Christian. But I will go farther than any of my humanist brethren, with whose views of ultimate loyalty I disagree sharply, and say that there ought to be a Humanist Club or a Humanist Fellowship in every Unitarian Church, sponsored by Christians, for those who have difficulty with Christian language, for those who find it difficult to see the Christian Way. At the same time, I call upon humanists to see how utterly lacking in nourishment are their attempts at non-theistic "worship," and to recognize that by insistence thereon, they are driving Unitarian Christians out of their church.

(From a pamphlet, *The Vestibule Function of Unitarianism*, distributed by the Unitarian Christian Fellowship.)

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